

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: DIGITAL PRESERVATION VIDEO SERIES

Digital Natives Explore Digital Preservation

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Narrator: Today's teenagers are part of the first generation to grow up immersed and fluent in the world of digital technologies. These "digital natives" depend on digital information for communication, education and entertainment. But today's Digital Natives may not know that digital information can easily be lost.

Student: "She said 'once it's online it's there forever,' and I wrote that down because that's the truth...so, as soon as it's on the internet it's saved..."

Narrator: Teens receive mixed messages about the permanence of digital information, because it seems that anything they want can be found on the internet. But the truth is, digital information will survive only as long as someone takes care of it.

In a recent workshop at the Library of Congress, we asked a group of students for their thoughts on digital preservation. Specifically about:

- What should be saved?
- Who's responsible for saving it?
- And what are the challenges in saving it?

Talking about digital materials, such as music, is one way to dispel the myth that whatever is online is there forever. In addition to music, there are many other valuable digital materials. So, what things should be saved?

Student: "They should just save Facebook. That is our generation's scrapbook, yearbook, Guinness World Record...they should just save Facebook."

Student: "But obviously you can't save everything but it would be good to get samples from everything like presidential speeches."

Student: "It's not really that important that we save all this stuff because what's important that we save is the stuff that people can learn from in history in the future as not to repeat history."

Narrator: Opinions vary on the specifics of what to save, but there is agreement that digital materials need to be preserved.

Student: "Music changes always."

Narrator: Even more challenging is determining who's responsible for preserving it.

Student: "If you choose to document that with a camera or a tape recorder or anything, you should be responsible for choosing it and saving it."

Student: “If people are going to be responsible for putting the information out there I think it should be the people’s responsibility to defend their rights to that information.”

Student: “Once they’re available to everyone if it’s important to someone they’ll personally save it.”

Narrator: In addition to figuring out the “what” and the “who” of digital preservation, there are unique challenges to preserving digital information, especially involving new technologies such as social media.

Student: “Like you were saying, you never know what’s going to be useful in the next 500 years.”

Student: “Things getting lost in cyberspace. There are a lot of things online but sometimes they are hard to find because there’s just so much out there.

Student: “It’s really not up to you. Once you put it out there it’s just on its own.”

Narrator: What should be saved? Who’s responsible for saving it? What are the challenges in saving it?

These are the issues the Library must deal with in its quest to collect, preserve and make available significant digital content for current and future generations.

There is much the Library can learn from digital natives. After all, they will use digital information in the future and will be charged with its care. At the same time, we need to help them understand the risks to digital information.

To learn more about digital preservation activities at the Library of Congress, please visit digitalpreservation.gov.